

Collecting Lepidoptera in Britain during 1976

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(Concluded from p. 220)

I was again in the Chiddingfold area on August 6th, this time en route to Kent, seeing there all the species of my previous visits with the addition of *Heodes phlaeas* L. My journey took me through Billingshurst to Haywards Heath and Mayfield, then on to Hawkhurst, then to Ashford where I put up at the well-appointed Spearpoint Hotel. My m.v. light that evening in the Orlestone woods attracted 30 species. Early arrivals included several *Harpyia furcula* Clerck. Five other Notodonts included *Pterostoma palpina* Clerck, *Lophopteryx capucina* L., *Pheosia gnoma* Fab., *P. tremula* and *Notodonta dromedarius* L. There were a good many *Drepana binaria* Hufn. and geometrids, especially *Semiothisa notata* L., *Deuteronomos alniaria* L., *D. erosaria* D. & S. and *Cleora rhomboidaria* D. & S. Mr. Dey who also ran an m.v. lamp nearby, saw in addition *Tethea* or D. & S., probably a second brood which is most unusual. The next day, the 7th, saw me at Hoads Wood, Dungeness, and Caesar's Camp, north of Folkestone, but nothing of note was moving, except a few *P. icarus*. That night at Ham Street again I had a fair number of visitors, this time at my Heath light, which as before included *H. furcula*, also *T. or*, *Sterrha subsericeata* Haworth, *Deuteronomos fuscantaria* Stephens, *Epirrhoë alternata* Müll. and *Agrotis puta* Hübn. Mr. Michael Tweedie's garden was my venue on August 8th, once more in very warm conditions with a number of Peacocks and many Pierids on his buddleia bushes. That night saw me for a third occasion at Ham Street when Mr. George Youden came over from Dover to join me, but we only saw some 20 species up until 11 p.m. Those not seen on the other nights were *Lymantria monacha* L., *Ligdia adustata* D. & S., *Ortholitha chenopodiata* L., and *Selenia bilunaria* L., *H. furcula*, *D. binaria* and *S. notata* all reappeared. I was back in Surrey on the 9th with a continuing heat wave and the thermometer in the upper 70's when I revisited Pewley Down on the 10th. *L. coridon* was nearly over, as was *P. icarus*. It was up to 82°F. in the shade when Prof. Sir John and Lady Dacie came to see me on August 12th. We had a walk on Horsell Common in the blazing sun without any wind, which seemed conducive for *Selidosema brunneata* D. & S. to be flushed in some numbers. Both sexes seemed very active and quite fresh. The thermometer remained in the lower 80's for the whole of the following week. On the 15th, Mr. Messenger came over but the Common proved much less productive than a few days before. We saw very few *S. brunneata* and only one late female Grayling. On August 21st I surveyed the downs at Ranmore where *Lysandra bellargus* Rott. had been abundant. There were still quite a lot flying

* Three Oaks, Shores Road, Horsell, Woking, Surrey.

of both sexes but not many in good condition. The second brood of *Scopula ornata* Scop. was quite numerous as was too *Aspitates gilvaria* D. & S. I was once more in King's Park Wood on the 22nd under a scorching sun. Brimstones and Meadow Browns were still plentiful and there were a few late Wood Whites and Common Blues.

The next morning, August 23rd, Mr. Messenger and I set out for the West Country and Cornwall, intending to spend the first night at Portland. But owing to a mishap to his car in the New Forest we had to return to Surrey. I picked him up the following day in my car and we travelled via Salisbury, Ilchester and Honiton to Exeter, then on via Okehampton to Tavistock where we stayed overnight. The next morning of the 25th we visited a locality where *Mellicta athalia* Rott. had been in abundance in June. The shade temperature was 84°F. which tempted out quite a lot of insects, and we recorded 11 species of butterflies which included Peacocks, Red Admirals and even Painted Ladies, with a few Small Coppers. We continued our journey via Liskeard to Truro and on to the Mullion Cove Hotel which had also been our haven in June 1974. En route we had seen a single male Clouded Yellow. The next morning of the 26th we explored the neighbourhood under still very summery conditions. Many Large Whites and Red Admirals were patronising the local buddleia bushes and were also present in numbers on valerian in the Poldhu and Gunwalloe Coves. The night was very sultry when we ran a Heath light alongside the marsh in Poldhu Cove. The chief feature was the early rush of *Hepialus sylvina* L. It was not long before a couple of dozen of this Swift were buzzing on the sheet. Another welcome visitor was a fresh *Nonagria geminipuncta* Haworth. Among a dozen other species we also saw *Thalpophila matura* Hufn., *Gortyna micacea* Esp., *Luperina testacea* D. & S., *Scopula promutata* Guen., *Lycometra ocellata* L. and the last arrival at 10.30 p.m. was a huge female *P. palpina*. That night we had inaugurated our static trap in the same site as in 1974, on the hotel lawn overlooking the high cliff. When we got back to view it, there was a seething concourse of moths flying around it. It was not long before we found a male *Herse convolvuli* L. on the wall of the swimming pool on which the m.v. light was shining. When we took our count the following morning, we estimated the number of individuals as at least 800, comprising some 40 species. There were five *Convolvulus* Hawks, all males, but the more interesting migrants were quite 20 *Leucania vitellina* D. & S., mostly of the cream form. There was a couple of males of the brown form of *Lasiocampa trifolii* D. & S. and a single *Leucania unipuncta* Haworth, together with several *Antitype xanthomista* Hübn., *Tholera popularis* Fab., *Peridroma porphyrea* D. & S., also some worn *Euxoa obelisca* D. & S. There was too a host of *Plusia gamma* L., at least 300. Among the geometers were a lot of *S. promutata*, *Epirrhoë galiata* D. & S., *Sterrha seriata* Schrank and a late *Hydriomena furcata* Thunb. We had certainly arrived at the time of a huge

immigration, as we heard later from other collectors on the Lizard. The subsequent six nights did not produce anything like the numbers of our phenomenal start, with only another 500 insects up to September 1st. There were many more *A. xanthomista* of both sexes and a single *Eupithecia phoeniceata* Rambur on August 27th. We saw in all ten *H. convolvuli*, which only included one female. When placed in a plastic container with some sea convolvulus she smothered it with some 70 ova. Most of them hatched on September 10th and young larvae were distributed among friends who, like myself, bred them up to their final instar in late October, resulting in some 35 pupae which have produced the first imagines in early December 1976 (*vide Ent. Rec.*, 88: 336). Our exploits by day took us to the Lizard on August 27th where we counted 15 Red Admirals on a big buddleia, accompanied by three Painted Ladies, several *A. urticae* and two *Macroglossa stellatarum* L. Later on Kennack Sands the fleabane was well patronised by *P. icarus* and a few *Heodes phlaeas* L. We again saw most of these butterflies on a very warm morning at Hellford River on the 29th. The Bank Holiday on the 30th presaged a first real break in the heat spell with heavy rain before midday and an overcast afternoon, when we unearthed a full-grown larva of *Hadena barrettii* Doubleday from under a dead plant of *Silene maritima* in Poldhu Cove. The last day of the month we went over to Praa Sands beyond Helston, where again Red Admirals were in plenty on the valerian. We paid two further nocturnal visits to the marsh at Poldhu Cove. Little came to our Heath lamp on the 28th except a few more *H. sylvina* and a single *N. geminipuncta*. Using the big portable m.v. light with generator there on the 31st, among 15 species were a female *Nonagria typhae* Thunb., also one of *Rhizedra lutosa* Hübn. together with *A. xanthomista*, *Agrotis vestigialis* Hufn., *Sterrrha dimidiata* Hufn. and *Orthonama lignata* Hübn.

We set out early on September 2nd and making our way via the Saltash Bridge to Exeter and on via Lyme Regis to Dorchester and Wimborne, we reached the New Forest soon after 5 p.m. and made the Lyndhurst Park (formerly the Grand) Hotel our headquarters, but we did not venture out that night. It was still quite warm when we made a tour of the Forest via Beaulieu and were pleased to find that this area had not been ravaged by the recent heath fires. Later we called on Admiral Torlesse at Sway where a good many Whites were on the wing and a few Small Tortoiseshells. That afternoon we motored back to Surrey, first to Whitley where Mr. Messenger left me, and then on to Woking. The first few days of September were quite congenial with the temperature in the 70's during most of the first week. It was very sultry when I was in King's Park Wood on the 5th, but most of the summer butterflies had gone and only a few Speckled Woods and Commas were seen. Little too was flying when I visited Mr. Denzil ffennell at Martyr Worthy, near Winchester, on the 9th. It was distinctly cooler during the middle of September

with plenty of rain to compensate for the lack of it during the previous long spell of drought. But the temperature maintained itself in the upper 60's until the third week, when it rose to over 70°F. for several days with plenty of Pierids still flying and a good many Red Admirals about on September 26th. The following evening *Dasycampa rubiginea* D. & S. appeared on some ivy growing on a wall at Horsell. The feature of early October was the reappearance of Peacocks, chiefly attracted to michaelmas daisies and even occasionally to m.v. light-trap. There seems very definite evidence that these were the product of a second brood, since the summer emergence was already about the middle of July. These autumn weeks were very pleasant with no frost and fairly equable temperatures. On October 8th I motored to Winterbourne Stickland, near Blandford, to stay with my relatives, but little was moving there or the next day when I visited Mr. and Mrs. R. Hatton at Holt, near Wimborne, or later that day at Mr. N. G. Wykes at Uploders, near Bridport. However, *Macroglossa stellatarum* L. appeared in my relatives' garden on the 10th and there were quite a few Red Admirals on decaying fruit in the garden of Mr. G. Nixon and of Mr. D. Russwurm in the New Forest on the 11th. The congenial conditions persisted for nearly the whole of October. Peacocks were still about on the 24th, also when I accompanied the Rev. Harbottle on a visit to Dr. H. B. Kettlewell at Steeple Barton, near Oxford, on the 25th. But nothing was attracted by my Heath light on the borders of Chobham Common on the 27th.

November opened with the thermometer still in the upper 50's, with a good assortment of the later geometers coming to m.v. light. On November 5th I left for the Seychelles Islands and Kenya, returning on the 27th to find that winter had virtually set in and the season had ended on a distinctly cool note.

It had been one of the most remarkable years of the century and 1976 will long be remembered for its profusion of lepidoptera and tropical temperatures at the turn of the summer. The great invasion of *Nymphalis antiopa* L. which simulated that of 1872, together with the huge immigration of *Herse convolvuli* L. and other migrants in late August, made it a veritable *annus mirabilis* which it will take long to surpass.

LARVAE OF CUCULLIA VERBASCI L. (MULLEIN MOTH) ON BUDDLEIA DAVIDII. — On 6th July, 1977, I was interested to find several larvae of this moth feeding on *Buddleia davidii* in this district. South (1961) does not mention this pabulum although the book states that the species has been noted on *B. globosa*, the more usual foodplants being mullein (*Verbascum* sp.) and figwort (*Scrophularia* sp.). Incidentally, these larvae are particularly numerous at the moment on mulleins in this locality. — F. B. S. ANTRAM, Valley Farm, Wissett, Halesworth, Suffolk, IP19 0JJ.